

Knowledge Management: An Emerging Phenomenon

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Abstract

It is unchallenging fact that knowledge is the driver of productivity and growth of any organizations. Therefore, it is essential for all organizations to give emphasis on how to manage its organizational knowledge. Knowledge Management is a discipline that promotes an integral approach to identifying capturing, retrieving, sharing, and evaluating an enterprise's knowledge asset. This paper deals with the emerging phenomenon of knowledge management, its characteristic features, problems relating to KM process and what Library and Information Professionals at best can do in order to achieve an organizational goal using the KM weapon.

[Keyword: Knowledge Management, KM Principles, KM Problems, Information Professionals]

1. Introduction

Knowledge is a fluid mix framed experienced values, contextual information, expert insights and grounded intuition that provides an environment and framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. In an information society, knowledge is the essential factors for long-term success of both individuals and organizations. But knowledge, an asset resides in many forms like databases, knowledgebase, people's head, and also distributed across the organizations. Since Library is an integral part of any organizations, therefore its professionals have some duty and responsibility to manage and make use of this valuable asset to achieve its respective organizations goals and objectives. They should also know what are the factors that directly or indirectly affects the knowledge management process. Librarian or Information Professionals should act as a knowledge manager who should know where the actual knowledge resides and how to manage it.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 Nonaka opines that Knowledge Management is a form of application of sound management practice to Human Resource as a whole, which are the carrying vectors of knowledge. Knowledge Management in a sense is the management of the organizational structures, facilitation of organizational members, putting information technology instruments with emphasis on teamwork and diffusion of knowledge into place.
- 2.2 Knowledge management is a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, retrieving, sharing and evaluating an enterprise's knowledge assets. These knowledge assets may include databases, documents, policies and procedures as well as the un-captured, tacit expertise and experience resident in individual works. (<http://www.knowledgebridge.com>).

3. Knowledge Management: Key Concept

Knowledge is recognized as a business asset and Knowledge Management is an emerging concept in business environment in the late 1990s. The implication of knowledge management is the understanding of organizational information flows and implementing organizational learning practices that make explicit key aspects of its knowledge base. Knowledge management is not about managing books, journals,

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Surfing Net, organizing documents in the Library etc. Knowledge management is about augmenting the use of institutional knowledge through sound practice of information management and organizational learning. KM is more managing information flow. It involves two fundamental components such as:

- ❖ Knowledge utilization and knowledge exploring;
- ❖ Application of people's competencies, skills, talents, thoughts, innovative ideas and imaginations.

It is need to capture the insights of field staff about why the products was not attractive to the customers and making this accessible quickly to markets and product developers is an example of utilizing knowledge. The fact that a reference librarian or sales people know why product or services has not been sold or utilized. Therefore, optimum knowledge management requires finding out the tacit knowledge from the working people and should apply it in favor of organizational benefit.

4. Why Knowledge Management?

As we are moving towards the knowledge economy therefore we have to think of what is the driving force of business economy. Obviously knowledge. It is a key factor in competitive advantage. Therefore, we are forced to welcome Knowledge Management. In the words of Marquardt (1998) "The economy has shifted from "brawn" to "brain". Knowledge is becoming more and more of every nations GNP". So, Knowledge Management is necessary for survival. Organizations can draw lessons from their success as well as failures. Failure to do will qualify them from remark of the famous philosopher George Santayana, ' Those who can't remember the past are condemned to repeat it'. It is a fact that only 20 % of the available knowledge in the organization are used properly and remaining 80% are not used due to the fact that it is very difficult to find out where such knowledge are resided. This problem can only be solved if we follow Knowledge Management principle.

- (i) To improve real productivity
- (ii) To survive in the warfare of real competitive world

To share knowledge among personnel of the organization with a view to fulfilling the required target. To enhance profitability in the case of profit making organization and to create a conducive service condition in the case of non-profit making organizations, knowledge management is advisable

5. Purpose of Knowledge Management

The main purpose of knowledge management is to deliver value to organize. The ultimate goal of knowledge management is to harness the knowledge resources and knowledge capabilities of the organizations in order to enable the organization to learn and adapt its changing environment. Therefore, KM practices try to draw out the tacit knowledge people have, what they carry around with them, what they observe and learn from experience, rather than what is usually explicitly stated. Managing knowledge is more difficult than capturing data and manipulating them to obtain information. Davenport's Management Process centered on acquisition, creation, packaging and application or reuse of knowledge.

6. Characteristics of Knowledge Management

Knowledge Management encompasses a very broad range of perspective. It engages with the complexities and nuances of human intellectual and innovating process communication cultures, values and intangible assets. It also recognizes the subjective, interpretive, and dynamic nature of knowledge. At the same time, it embraces the dramatic development of information technology seeks to bring their benefits effectively to the organization. The characteristics of knowledge management depend mostly on the characteristic feature of both knowledge and management. Some of them are mentioned below:

- ❖ Knowledge is messy
- ❖ Knowledge is self-organizing
- ❖ Knowledge seeks community
- ❖ Knowledge travels via language
- ❖ The more you try to pin knowledge down, the more it slips away.
- ❖ Knowledge is dynamic
- ❖ No one is in-charge
- ❖ How you define knowledge determines how you manage it.
- ❖ There is no one solution
- ❖ KM is an infinite loop that never ends.
- ❖ Knowledge is a corporate an asset.

7. Fundamental Steps in Knowledge Management

Three basic steps are involved in the knowledge management. These three steps are as follows:

- Knowledge acquisition
- Knowledge sharing
- Knowledge utilization

7.1 Knowledge Acquisition

Knowledge acquisition is not to be confused with information acquisition. Knowledge acquisition is the process of development and creation of insights, skills, and relationships. For example, when an experienced stockbrokers can see the trend line on a computer monitor and tell which way the market is headed-- that is an example of acquired knowledge.

7.2 Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is the next component. Knowledge sharing cannot be mandated. The whole notion of sharing what an employee knows is diametrically opposite to the way in which reward structures in most organizations work. Why would anyone wants to share his knowledge? Employee will do this only if head of the organization or company provide job security. An example is expert system.

7.3 Knowledge utilization

Knowledge utilization comes into the picture when learning is integrated into the organizations. Whatever is broadly available throughout the organization can be generalized and applied at least in part to new situations. It is very difficult to distinguish between the two concepts 'knowledge sharing' and 'knowledge utilization'. Sometimes these two steps take place simultaneously. Any computer supported facility to enhance these functions, in part or whole, will have to keep these three fundamental steps in clear view before successful implementation the concept 'knowledge management'.

According to Boynton, there are four steps in any knowledge management activities--

- ❖ Making knowledge visible
- ❖ Building knowledge intensity
- ❖ Developing a knowledge culture
- ❖ Building knowledge infrastructure

These steps are independent and inter-linked at each other. In delineating the four steps, Boynton is clear that knowledge management is not new. But, all firms or organizations are not in a position to understand the importance of knowledge management in terms of each of the above four steps. First steps says that you can 'make knowledge visible' either by finding out who knows what or applying taxonomy of expertise knowledge; or using yellow pages and developing competencies. Second step says that for 'building knowledge intensity' it is essential to provide training, face-to-face contracts, creating network environment etc. Third step says that 'knowledge culture' can be develop by sharing or exchanging knowledge, creating conducive situation in trust at each other, motivating people or by giving rewards to people for their excellent qualities. Fourth step says that 'building knowledge infrastructure' primarily requires to develop common communication infrastructure, access to external or internal sources and the use of modern technology.

8. Principles to be followed in Knowledge Management

Thomas Davenport [4], one of the well-known experts in KM concepts, lists some of principles of KM, which are as follows:

- Knowledge Management is expensive
- Knowledge Management requires knowledge managers
- Knowledge Management is highly political.
- Effective management of knowledge requires hybrid solutions of people and technology
- Knowledge Management benefits more from maps than models more from markets than from hierarchy
- Sharing and using knowledge are often unnatural acts
- Knowledge Management never ends

8.1 KM is expensive

Knowledge is an asset, but its effective management requires investment of other assets, for the following activities:

- Knowledge captures i.e creation of documents into computer system
- Adding value to the knowledge through editing, packaging and pruning
- Developing knowledge categorization approaches
- Developing information technology infrastructure
- Educating employee on the creation, sharing, and use of knowledge.

8.2 KM requires knowledge managers

According to Davenport, knowledge cannot be well managed if some group within an organization take initiative and perform a clear responsibility about the job. Knowledge managers require to collect and categorize knowledge and established a knowledge centered technology infrastructure.

8.3 KM is highly political

Davenport opines that knowledge is highly political undertakings. As it is associated with money, power and success, it is intertwined with lobbying, intrigue and backroom deals. Knowledge managers lobby for the use of value of knowledge. They will cultivate influential opinion leaders that reflect the concept of Information Gatekeepers.

8.4 Effective KM requires hybrid solutions of people and technology

Davenport tries to express that firms wishing to effectively manage knowledge today need a heavy dose of human labor. Humans are very good in certain types of activities, computers at others. When we seek to understand knowledge, to interpret it within a broader context, to combine it with other types of information, or to synthesize various unstructured forms of knowledge, humans are the recommended tools.

Computers and communications, on the other hand, are good at different types of things. For the capture, transformation, and distribution of highly structured knowledge that changes rapidly, computers are more capable than people.

8.5 KM benefits more from Maps than Models, more from Markets than from Hierarchies

Most organizations are better off letting the knowledge market and simply providing and mapping the knowledge that its users seems to want. The dispersion of knowledge as described in a map may be illogical, but is still more helpful to the users than a hypothetical knowledge model that is best understood by its creators. Knowledge managers should read the market with thoroughly with their powerful vision and try to make knowledge as attractive and accessible as possible to its users. This principle is in line with Dr. S R Ranganathan's fourth law of Library and Information Science i.e " save the time of the users".

8.6 Sharing and using knowledge are often unnatural acts

Davenport points out that it is not natural for human being to share the valuable resources. Therefore, most of the employees' tendency will be to hoard it as much as possible. To enter our knowledge into the system and to seek out knowledge from others is not an easy task. Here lies the capability of knowledge managers who should be able to motivate the employees in an organization by providing some small incentives, by padding, or with the help of supernatural convincing power. Here we find the similarity of Fayol's 14th principles of management theory 'Espirit de corps'.

8.7 KM never end

Knowledge is dynamic and ever-growing by nature. Dr. S.R.Ranganathan's fifth law says ' Library is a growing organization'. This is because knowledge is ever-growing and ever-ending in nature and books are the embodiment of knowledge. But, this law holds good for any other organizations. The reason is that technology, products, customers, environment, market etc are changing in nature. People's expectations and demand are increasing by leaps and bounds day by day. Therefore, the required categories of knowledge are always changing and new technologies, management approaches and customers concerns are always emerging.

9. Problems of Knowledge Management

- (i) It is very difficult to identify knowledge where it belongs.
- (ii) Generally, people's attitude is void of disclosing of what they know. It is a psychological phenomenon.

- (iii) There are two types of knowledge – explicit knowledge that can be codified, electronically stored and transmitted. But, Tacit Knowledge (personnel, context specific) is very difficult to codify and the result of a diverse range of personal experience.
- (iv) Sharing knowledge is a great idea but it requires a free market approach (creating knowledge demand and supply) to work. The problem is that there is a lack of free market.
- (v) Building the relationships with senior client executives – which were tacit in nature and difficult to extract from the minds of practitioners.
- (vi) Often difficulties arise for developing ‘*culture*’ for knowledge management;
- (vii) Another challenges of adopting organizations knowledge management is assessing its progress and whether resources devoted to it were justified.
- (viii) Imperfection in knowledge assessment.
- (ix) Continuous changing nature of 'users need' and 'users behavior'.
- (x) Often change in business climate.

10 Information Professionals in Knowledge Management

Knowledge Management has emerged as a key concern of organizations. Librarians have long been regarded as part of the support staff of the organization, working quietly in the background, often uninvolved in any of the critical functions of the organization. Information professionals have to recast their roles as an knowledge professionals. In other words, librarians need to work as knowledge worker. Knowledge work is characterized by varieties and exceptions rather than routine and is performed by professional or technical workers with a high level of skill and expertise. So those who exercise their intellects in any of these types of activities are knowledge workers. If librarian's work can be or is totally routinized, then they are an administrative worker (for example, gatekeeper), not a knowledge worker. That means that librarian's roles should be not limited to being the custodians or gatekeepers of information. Knowledge professionals will have to move from the background to the center of the organizational stage, to jointly hold the reins of knowledge management with users and the technology experts, to help steer and shape the knowledge policies, structures, processes, and systems that will nurture organizational learning. Knowledge professionals should be able to extract, filter and disseminate vital external knowledge. They also will design and develop workgroup application suites that are effectively platforms for knowledge management. Finally, they will work side by side with users in collecting and analyzing strategic intelligence; and to act as trainers and consultants who transfer knowledge gathering and research skills throughout the organization.

11. Comments

- (i) Knowledge Management can certainly work for business environment.
- (ii) For knowledge management three things (i.e planning, doing, outcome) have to be executed sequentially and it is a circular approach.
- (iii) It is not a one-time business, rather it is continuous process.
- (iv) KM does not necessarily need Information System but essentially require information Technology.
- (v) KM to be successful calls for personnel having been enriched in computer technology, personnel management and Information Science.
- (vi) Organizational politics come into play when knowledge exists, is used, and is exchanged.
- (vii) KM is an extension of IM (Information Management).

12. Conclusion

Knowledge Management is a burning topic today but basically, this notion and its inherent activities; principles are not new to the LIS Professionals. In response to the question raised in a journal that, " How far LIS Professionals will be able to successful in materializing knowledge management activities?" My perception regarding knowledge management and the question of ability of LIS Professionals is that they have to be acquainted with increasingly sophisticated information technology that are coming up. For success in knowledge management, it has to be considered not only 'technology' but 'cultural change' and 'change in the reward structure' also. The ultimate key to knowledge management activities lies on the hands of people in the organization. Therefore, in order to be successful knowledge manager, he/she has to gain the hearts and the minds of the workers by hook or by crook.

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